Abstract of Ph.D. Thesis

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Topic of Research: **"Acquiescence and Resistance: A Study of Select Dalit Women's Autobiographies in English Translation"**

Purpose of the Study:

The main aim of this thesis is to explore and understand the lived experiences, struggles, resistance, and identity formation of Dalit women as depicted in the selected autobiographies. The thesis seeks to highlight the voices of Dalit women authors who, through their autobiographies, provide a unique insight into the intersectionality of caste and gender discrimination. It aims to analyze these works against the backdrop of socio-cultural and historical aspects of Dalit lives in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, thus enabling a comparative study of the two regions.

The research questions guiding the work include:

1.   How do the selected autobiographies represent the socio-cultural and historical experiences of Dalit women in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu?

2.   What themes of struggle, protest, and self-assertion emerge from these works, and how do they contribute to the discourse of Dalit and feminist literature?

3.   How do the autobiographies portray the intersectionality of caste and gender discrimination faced by Dalit women?

4.   How do these narratives illustrate the journey of Dalit women toward self-emancipation and identity formation?

5.   How do these works reflect upon and challenge the mainstream understanding of Dalit lives and experiences?

Significance of the Study:

Intersectionality in Feminist Scholarship: By focusing on the experiences of Dalit women, the study contributes to the understanding of intersectionality in feminist scholarship. The intersection of caste and gender presents unique challenges that are often overlooked in mainstream feminist discourses. This study underscores the need for a more inclusive feminism that addresses these challenges.

Contribution to Dalit Literature: The analysis of autobiographies of Dalit women writers enriches Dalit literature by providing a comprehensive exploration of the struggles, resistance, and self-assertion of Dalit women. It also highlights the importance of autobiographical narratives as a form of self-expression and resistance.

Regional Variations: The comparative study of Dalit women's experiences in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu contributes to our understanding of the regional variations in caste and gender oppression. This has implications for policy interventions and social initiatives, emphasizing the need for context-specific strategies.

Social Understanding: By bringing the narratives of Dalit women into the mainstream, the study contributes to social understanding of caste and gender issues. It promotes empathy, awareness, and a more nuanced understanding of the realities of marginalization.

Policy Implications: The insights from this study can inform policy-making related to caste and gender issues. It can guide the formulation of inclusive policies that effectively address the specific challenges faced by Dalit women.

Future Research: By uncovering new aspects of Dalit women's experiences, this study also paves the way for future research in this area. It opens up new avenues for exploring and understanding the intersection of caste, gender, and regional variations.

Objectives of the Study:

1.   To critically analyze selected autobiographies of Dalit women writers.

2.   To contextualize these narratives within the larger socio-cultural and historical contexts of Dalit life in India, especially within the regions of Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

3.   To Highlight the Intersection of Caste and Gender.

4.   To draw comparisons between the experiences of Dalit women in different linguistic and cultural contexts.

5.   To contribute to the growing body of Dalit literature and feminist scholarship by adding to the discourse on the experiences of Dalit women.

6.   To use the insights from the analysis to inform social understanding and policy-making related to caste and gender issues.

Research Methodology:

The Qualitative research method is used here. It includes information from different interviews, library visits and the study of primary texts. Secondary texts like books, journals, articles, essays are also used to make this work analytical in structure.

Review of Literature:

In her publication titled *Writing Caste /Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios* (2006), Sharmila Rege emphasized the incorporation of a feminist lens in the analysis of the Dalit movement and literature. Furthermore, it promotes the notion of autonomous feminism for Dalit women, as their specific concerns and issues are often overlooked by leaders within the mainstream feminist movement.

Anindita Pan's Book *Mapping Dalit Feminism: Towards an Intersectional Standpoint* (2020) discusses the oppression of the Dalit women as intersectional meaning oppression of caste and gender. This book challenges the mainstream Indian feminism and Dalit politics. To understand the Dalit feminist approach, this book plays an important role.

Gopal Guru's *Atrophy in Dalit Politics* (2005) discusses the self-proclaimed leaders of Dalits who does everything for their own benefits. These leaders are not only the people from outside but the people within the Dalit community. This book is helpful to understand the problems of the proper upliftment of the Dalits. His next book titled, *Humiliation: Claims & Context* (2009) shows us the complex and multiple meanings and practices of humiliation are presented within an interdisciplinary framework, incorporating constructs from history, sociology, psychology, and political theory, and could thus help expand the meaning of other concepts like justice, equality, and nationalism. The essays also suggest that it is the socio-cultural context that decides the nature, level, and intensity of humiliation. This cultural specificity provides a vantage point that could be used to develop a comparative perspective on humiliation. *Seeking Begumpura: The Social Vision of Anti-Caste Intellectuals* (2008), Gail Omvedt, marks a watershed in the battle to uncover the hearts and minds of the oppressed and

powerless – the 'subalterns' of the Subcontinent's history. She stresses on the reshaping of subaltern vision for a better world.

Likewise, Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* (2014) says that the caste and its religious bases must be destroyed, for they stand against liberty, equal treatment, and fraternity that every human being needs to survive. Caste stands against the consciousness of kind and against national integration. Caste stands against the direct action of common people.

Uma Chakravorty's *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens* (2003) examines the role of women in the perpetuation of caste and the need to go beyond the conventional dichotomy of purity and pollution.

Sudha Pai's *Dalit Assertion* (2013) is an introductory book that argues that the Dalit movement is in a phase of transition in which it has been able to question, with some degree of success, but not overcome upper caste domination and oppression and introduce transformation. While highlighting the achievements of Dalit assertion, this work also discusses its weaknesses, limitations, and possibilities.

Sharan kumar Limbale and Jaydeep Sarangi edited *Dalit Voice: Literature and Revolt* (2018) focuses on literature's social and political role in Dalit movements for human rights. This book is a discussion on the issues of privilege and subjugation which divide society and limit lives.

Raj Kumar's pioneering book *Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and Identity* (2017) primarily examines Dalit autobiographies. It is a historic breakthrough because till recently, Dalits in India were voiceless. These narratives thus symbolize how Dalits are breaking down the age-old barrier of silence. The autobiographies are located against a socio-cultural background, along with the emergence of Dalit literature, Dalit life-narratives, while revealing their everyday caste and class exploitations that call for the restoration of dignity and

self-respect. In itself, the very emergence of Dalit autobiography is an act of resistance because Dalits are using this opportunity to assert their identities through their writings. Through the autobiographies, one gets a glimpse into the life of a community struggling against deprivation, discrimination and exploitation at the hands of a society ridden with caste biases and unequal opportunities.

Some movies like *Bandit Queen* (1994), *Aarakshan* (2011), *Masaan* (2015), *Sairat* (2016), *Article 15* (2019), *Jai Bhim* (2021) are also representing the lives of marginalized and it helps us to understand the issues of the marginalized.

The meaning of 'Dalit' is 'broken' or 'scattered' in Sanskrit. This term is used to refer to the oppressed or suppressed group of people due to their caste. It was popularized by reformer Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who included all depressed people irrespective of their caste into the definition of dalits. Mahatma Gandhi used the term 'Horijans' to them to mean 'Child of God'. Indian government of course used 'Scheduled Caste' to identify the untouchables. Likewise, Marathi reformer Mahatma Jyotirao Phule coined this term 'Dalit' to elaborate outcastes and untouchables as oppressed class. But this term got its significance when the Dalit Panther Movement of Maharashtra used 'Dalit' as 'a continuous reminder of their suppression and sufferings'. As a term, now-a-days, this term stands for those people who have considered outcaste as they are not inclusive of the four-fold divisions of the class structure. Dalits are not born but they are socially constructed segmented groups. Since time immemorial, they are suffering for the societal norms and mores. In *Manu Smriti*, the four folded caste system is seen – Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. As in the mythology, it is described that the Shudra was born from the feet of the Lord; they were debarred equality in the society. They were believed to be the servants only. They lived in the outskirts of other localities and fed on the left over's of the rich classes. In the first half of the 20th century, these people are not provided

the basic amenities of life. Even they are restricted to enter in the temples. In this way, dalits are living a non-healthy life in the society.

Actually, Dalits were not recognized economically, politically, culturally and even materially and this results deprivation of all human rights and amenities. Now there are two ways left to them: one to educate themselves and the other is to raise their voice against the age old suppression made by the other divisions of society. Gradually following hardships of life, a class of educated Dalits came into existence to raise their voice through movements. A series of movements influenced Dalit writers to be conscious of their own identity and status in the society. These humiliated group of people started writing as an outburst of their sorrows over the so-called society. The Dalit writers never look back to the history of writing or to the conventional style of writing. Instead of that, they created their own style of writing and they want to write their own history.

In this study, an attempt is made to examine some selected autobiographies of Dalit women writers in the light of the socio- cultural and historical backdrops of Dalits focusing more on their sufferings, protest and self- assertions to have their own identity and status as 'other' human beings. In this proposed study, we take the following texts: Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life (2019)* translated by Maya Pandit, Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke (2018)* translated by Maya Pandit, Bama's *Karukku (2019)* translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom and Viramma's *Viramma: Life of a Dalit (1998)* translated by Will Hobson. The first two texts are originally written in Marathi and the last two are in Tamil and this will give us a comparative scenario of the Dalit women's life in both the states Maharashtra and Tamilnadu.

Chapter I: "Introduction" of the thesis serves as the foundation, where the main objectives, research questions, and the overall significance of the study are laid out comprehensively. The chapter begins by establishing the research context, highlighting the

need to explore Dalit women's autobiographies as a crucial window into understanding their socio-cultural and historical backdrops. The specific focus on Dalit women authors from Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu provides a comparative perspective, enriching the study with regional nuances.

The objectives of the study are then clearly outlined. These objectives primarily revolve around examining the selected autobiographies to uncover the layers of sufferings, protests, and self-assertions of Dalit women, aiming to understand their struggle for identity and recognition as 'other' human beings within their societal contexts. The chosen texts, including Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*, Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*, Bama's *Karukku,* and Viramma's *Viramma: Life of a Dalit* , serve as the primary materials for this exploration.

Chapter II, titled "Dalits: The Socio- Cultural and Historical Aspects" comprehensively explores the historical and socio-cultural landscape that has shaped the Dalit community's existence, particularly in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. The chapter begins by tracing the roots of the Dalit identity, delving into the origins and historical progression of the caste system in India. It examines how centuries of social stratification have embedded deep inequalities, impacting the Dalits' social status, economic opportunities, and access to resources. The narrative then shifts to the significant historical milestones that have influenced the Dalit struggle, including legislative reforms and socio-political movements led by key figures such as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

Chapter III, titled "Understanding Dalit Women in Dalit Autobiographies" delves into the heart of the selected Dalit women's autobiographies, offering an in-depth analysis of the themes and narratives that emerge from these influential texts. This exploration aims to

understand the lived experiences of Dalit women as depicted in their autobiographies, shedding light on their struggles, resilience, and paths towards self-assertion.

Personal narratives form a crucial part of this analysis. The chapter scrutinizes how each author narrates their journey, encompassing their childhood experiences, education, family life, and social activism. These narratives are pivotal in understanding the individual and collective identity of Dalit women. The chapter highlights how personal stories reflect broader socio-cultural realities and contribute to a more profound understanding of the Dalit woman's suffering.

Chapter IV titled "Dalit Women and Voices of Protest" focuses on the forms of protest and resistance as depicted in the autobiographies of Dalit women. This critical examination reveals a spectrum of resistive actions and expressions, ranging from subtle acts of defiance to overt protests against the oppressive caste system and gender discrimination. The chapter begins by contextualizing the nature of resistance within the Dalit women's movement, acknowledging that rally in these narratives often intertwines personal and political realms. The texts under study showcase various forms of resistance, each unique in its articulation yet unified in its purpose – to challenge and dismantle systemic injustices.

The discussion then shifts to exploring the varied forms of resistance these women embody. This includes everyday acts of defiance against caste-based norms and gender roles and more organized forms of activism. The chapter delves into how these women challenge traditional expectations, often by asserting their right to education, freedom of expression, and participation in public life. It also examines moments in the texts where they directly confront oppressive structures, be it through participation in political movements, writing, or vocal opposition to unjust practices within their communities. These autobiographies serve as a

medium for the authors to rewrite their histories and reclaim their narratives, a powerful form of resistance.

Chapter- V titled "Dalit Women and Their Journey towards Self-Emancipation" delves deeply into the journey of self-emancipation and identity formation experienced and expressed by Dalit women in their autobiographies. This chapter serves as an exploration into the transformative experiences of the authors that not only highlight their struggles but also their journey towards self-awareness and liberation. By closely examining the narratives of Urmila Pawar, Baby Kamble, Bama, and Viramma, the chapter uncovers the nuanced process of identity formation against a backdrop of systemic oppression and social marginalization. The chapter begins by exploring the concept of self-emancipation within the Dalit context. It underscores how, for Dalit women, the journey towards self-liberation is intrinsically linked to their struggles against caste discrimination and gender biases. The autobiographies offer profound insights into how these women navigate a society structured to undermine their existence and gradually forge a path toward self-definition and empowerment. The chapter thus highlights how these narratives contribute significantly to the discourse on caste, gender, and empowerment, offering invaluable insights into the lived experiences of Dalit women and their journey toward claiming their rightful place in society.

Chapter VI is the "Conclusion" where we have summarized the entire thesis and findings are given. Moreover, some new avenues or areas of research in this field are also stated for future research.

The research problem at the heart of this study revolves around exploring the lived experiences of Dalit women as portrayed in their autobiographies. This includes an investigation into the multifaceted issues of caste discrimination, gender inequality, and the search for identity and self-emancipation in the face of systemic oppression. The study aims to

understand how these autobiographies not only reflect the personal struggles and triumphs of Dalit women but also serve as a lens to view the broader socio-cultural and historical contexts that shape their lives.

In addressing the research problem, the thesis first laid a foundational understanding of the socio-cultural and historical backdrops of the Dalits. This included an exploration of the deep-seated caste dynamics and gender biases prevalent in Indian society, which have historically marginalized Dalit women. The thesis underscores how these factors have contributed to the complex struggles faced by these women, thus setting the stage for a deeper understanding of their autobiographical narratives.

The autobiographies were then studied to uncover the lived realities of Dalit women as told by them. This approach ensured an authentic and nuanced understanding of their experiences, as opposed to interpretations filtered through external perspectives. The narratives provided valuable insights into the personal and collective struggles of Dalit women against caste oppression and gender discrimination, thus directly addressing the research problem by bringing these issues to the fore.

Furthermore, the thesis explored the various forms of protest and resistance embedded in these narratives. This was crucial in understanding how Dalit women, despite being marginalized, have found ways to assert their identity and fight for their rights. The autobiographies revealed a range of strategies used by these women, from overt acts of defiance to subtle forms of resistance, highlighting their agency in challenging the status quo.

Another significant aspect of the thesis was its focus on the journey towards self-emancipation as depicted in the autobiographies. This included analyzing how Dalit women, through their personal stories, charted pathways to self-discovery, empowerment, and identity formation. By examining these journeys, the thesis contributed to a broader understanding of

how marginalized individuals can navigate oppressive systems and find spaces for self-expression and liberation.

The study brings to light the varied ways Dalit women articulate their identities and experiences, moving beyond the familiar narratives of victimhood. The autobiographies reveal a rich tapestry of resilience, agency, and resistance, countering the often singular and monolithic representations of Dalit women in mainstream discourse. This shift from viewing Dalit women merely as victims of oppression to recognizing them as active agents in their life stories is a significant revelation.

Another significant contribution is the comparative analysis of Dalit women's experiences in different regional contexts within India. By examining texts from both Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the thesis provides a denounced understanding of how regional and cultural differences impact the lives and struggles of Dalit women. This comparative approach reveals the diverse manifestations of caste and gender discrimination, thus challenging any monolithic view of the Dalit experience and showcasing the complexity and variability within these experiences.

The personal accounts of Urmila Pawar, Baby Kamble, Bama, and Viramma, each distinct in their voice and experiences, collectively weave a tapestry rich in its depiction of pain, hope, and resilience. Their journeys towards self-emancipation are not just personal victories but are emblematic of a larger struggle for social justice. In documenting their lives, these women have done more than narrate their stories; they have challenged the status quo, questioned deep-rooted social hierarchies, and carved out spaces for future generations of Dalit women to assert their presence more forcefully in the socio-cultural landscape.

This research has also highlighted the crucial role of translation in bringing these powerful stories to a broader audience. In their skillful navigation of language and cultural

nuances, the translators have ensured that the essence of these experiences reaches readers beyond their immediate geographic and linguistic contexts. This act of translation is not just a linguistic exercise but is a vital bridge connecting disparate worlds, fostering understanding and empathy across cultural and social divides.

Reflecting on this journey, it becomes evident that while the study has provided significant insights into the lives of Dalit women through their autobiographies, it has also opened up new questions and areas of exploration. It underscores the ongoing need to listen to and amplify marginalized voices, continually challenge preconceived notions, and engage in research that seeks to understand and contribute to positive social change.

The exploration of Dalit women's autobiographies opens numerous avenues for future research, each offering the potential to enhance further understanding of these complex narratives and the broader socio-cultural context in which they are situated.

One significant area for future research is the exploration of generational differences in the experiences and expressions of Dalit women. This could involve examining the autobiographies of younger Dalit women to understand how contemporary issues, such as globalization, digital media, and changing socio-political landscapes, impact their lives and identities. Such studies could reveal evolving forms of resistance and assertion of identity among newer generations.

Another valuable area of research would be a comparative study of Dalit women's experiences across different Indian states or even countries. While this study focuses on Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, extending this research to other regions could uncover a more diverse range of experiences and perspectives, highlighting the complexity and heterogeneity within the Dalit community.

Furthermore, an interdisciplinary approach combining literary analysis with social, psychological, or political perspectives could yield more profound insights. For instance, integrating psychological theories in the study of autobiographies could uncover the impact of caste and gender discrimination on mental health. At the same time, a political perspective could shed light on how these narratives influence and are influenced by Dalit politics.

The role of language and translation in shaping the narratives of Dalit women's autobiographies also presents an intriguing field of study. Exploring how the nuances of the original language are retained or altered in translation and how this impacts the reception and interpretation of these stories could significantly contribute to translation studies and postcolonial literature.

Another avenue could be the study of Dalit women's autobiographies in other forms of media, such as film, theatre, and digital platforms. Examining how these stories are adapted and represented in different media could offer insights into the changing landscape of Dalit women's narratives and their reach and impact in the digital age.

Lastly, research could delve into the impact of these autobiographies on Indian society and policy-making. Understanding how these narratives have influenced public opinion, policy, and legal frameworks regarding Dalits and women could provide valuable information for activists, policymakers, and scholars.

Each of these areas offers the potential to expand academic understanding and contribute to broader societal conversations about caste, gender, and identity in India.